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SUBJECT: GREEK GOVERNMENT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT CYPRIOT ELECTIONS

Classified By: A/PolCouns Jeff Hovenier for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On February 21, MFA A2 Cyprus Department Director Ambassador Dimitris Yannakakis told A/PolCouns that the GOG is monitoring the Cypriot elections with cautious optimism. Greece notes positively the fact that both Dimitris Christofias and Iannis Kasoulides have expressed readiness to deal with Talat after the election. Greece is willing to do its part to encourage the process in Cyprus as well. Yannakakis said that Greece has expressed no preference for either candidate.

¶2. (C) On the issue of any potential U.S. role in advancing progress in Cyprus, Yannakakis emphasized that the international community must give whoever is elected President in Cyprus some "breathing space" before pushing for renewed talks. The new President will take office on March 11. Greece expects him to visit Athens "very shortly" thereafter, as has been past practice. Yannakakis said it is Greece's expectations that either candidate would "move quickly" after taking office, but maybe not "in the very first weeks." Yannakakis also noted that the U.S. will have an important role to play in encouraging the Turkish government to constructively engage.

¶3. (C) Once the new government is in place, opined Yannakakis, the next move is up to Ankara, not Nicosia. Resolving Cyprus is key to Turkey's EU accession. "It is now a question of when Turkey wants to join the EU and what it is willing to sacrifice to get there." We responded that Turkey's desire to join the EU is not in question, but EU accession should also not be seen as the only factor influencing Turkish behavior in Cyprus. Yannakakis agreed, noting that Greece would closely follow the Turkish military reaction to the new Cypriot government. He added that while (unspecified) elements of the Annan Plan likely would form part of the basis for future negotiations, the Annan Plan itself is "off the table." The Turks must be ready to start from another position.

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